



Source Water Assessment Program Implementation

The Safe Drinking Water Act requires completion of source water assessments under the Montana Source Water Protection Program by May 2003. DEQ is currently making plans to meet this deadline. The assessments will be done in-house at DEQ and by other persons or groups outside DEQ. Funds and contracts will be available to public water supplies who wish to complete the assessments. DEQ will place a high priority on completing assessments for public water systems whose source water is sensitive to contamination. Source water sensitivity is defined here as the relative ease with which contaminants can migrate to the source water. Surface waters and shallow unconfined aquifers found in Montana's river valleys are the most sensitive source waters in Montana; consequently, these areas will be our main focus.

Public water systems with sensitive sources will be further prioritized for completing source water assessments. Large community public water systems and public water systems that serve children, senior citizens, medical patients, or others who are unusually vulnerable to disease will be assigned high priority. Completion of source water assessments for these systems will provide the most public health benefit in the shortest time. Moderate priority will go to other community public water systems and non-community, non-transient public water systems that serve businesses and have sensitive source waters. Low priority will go to non-community, transient public water systems such as restaurants, bars, campgrounds, and other establishments that serve people on a temporary or intermittent basis and community water systems with less sensitive

source waters.

How does this strategy translate into action? Approximately 225,000 people receive water from the five largest surface water systems in Montana. Another 70,000 receive groundwater via public water systems from the Missoula Valley Aquifer, a shallow unconfined aquifer. DEQ has set a high priority to complete the source water assessments for these public water systems. Source water assessments for public water systems that serve vulnerable populations also will be completed early on.

Other factors will be used to prioritize within the general priority groups described above. DEQ will consider the detection of contaminants during monitoring and local interest in source water protection when completing source water assessments or evaluating proposals for funding. Regional or watershed projects also will get preference. For example, we hope to work with local water quality districts to complete assessments for public water supplies within their boundaries.

For information on how specific public water supplies fit into this strategy, contact anyone on the DEQ contacts list on the back page.



New Source Water Protection Staff

The Source Water Protection Section is at full staff for the push to implement the Source Water Protection Program by the statutory deadline imposed by congress. Jim Stimson, a hydrogeologist, and Carolyn DeMartino, a geologist, were recently hired to fill the remaining staff positions.

Jim comes to the program from the Natural Resource Information System at the state library. He brings a wealth of experience with Montana water resources and geographic information systems.

Carolyn previously was with DEQ's Remediation Division and brings a diverse background with spill and release sites in a variety of hydrogeologic settings.

In addition to permanent staff, two interns have been hired to compile information necessary to complete source water assessments.

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Water Quality Information Website

DEQ has developed an Internet site designed to provide access to organizational information, laws, rules, permitting information, standards, and bulletins related to water quality in Montana (<http://www.deq.state.mt.us/wqinfo/index.htm>). HB 596 passed by the 1999 Legislature requires that DEQ develop this site to describe DEQ Water quality related programs and activities. The following information is included:

Water Quality Laws and Administrative Rules

This Internet site provides the full text of the laws and rules that govern Montana's water quality programs. The laws include all changes enacted by the 1999 Legislature. Information is grouped

into two broad categories: 1) laws that have water quality as their principal topic; and 2) laws requiring that water quality impacts be considered.

The administrative rules are the most current versions available. Rules that are not available electronically will be added to the website as soon as they are completed.

Water Quality Programs and Activities

The programs and activities that implement state and federal water quality laws are described in this section. The following are included for each where appropriate: the relevant sections of the laws and rules; lists and samples of permits, licenses, and other approvals; copies of application forms, instructions, requirements, checklists, and review procedures; and any fact sheets, guides, reports, and educational brochures. A DEQ staff contact is provided for each program or activity.

Water Quality Circulars

A number of circulars are available that include the standards and requirements necessary to protect public health and to maintain a high level of water quality in the state. DEQ developed these circulars to comply with the Montana Water Quality Act and other state and federal laws that govern water quality. Some of the circulars are currently being revised and updated. The new versions will be placed on this website as they become available.

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